



A CASE STUDY ON 'CHAYA CHECHI'- THE ONE WHO DELIVERS TEA AND SNACKS ON HER FLOATING TEA SHOP AT KUMARAKOM.

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Abstract: Kumarakom is a beautiful village located in the western part of Kottayam district, Kerala. It's known for its enchanting backwaters and canals. This village secured many awards and achievements for the responsible tourism initiatives. Coconut Lagoon resort, is a heritage four resort located in the banks of Vembanad Lake, Kavanattinkara, Kumarakom Village. The resort resembles a small village and has made every effort to provide as many opportunities for locals to earn a living from the resort as possible as part of responsible tourism initiative. When possible, products are sourced locally, and locals are given preference for employment opportunities. This study examines the resort's social responsibility initiatives and Mrs. Shanthakumari's life. Shanthakumari and her husband were running small teashop in the village and due to certain personal reasons, she lost the teashop. This case is analysing the entrepreneurial opportunity provided by Coconut Lagoon resort to Mrs. Shanthakumari and exponential changes ensued in her life.

Keywords: Community Based Tourism, Rural Tourism, Floating Tea Shop, Mrs. Shanthakumari, Coconut Lagoon Resort.

1 Introduction

Positive influences from tourism development were felt in local communities in Kumarakom. Kumarakom's responsible tourism initiatives are primarily successful due to the support of the community and the untiring efforts of the local government. Economic, social, environmental, and regional advancement of the destination is the primary facet of responsible tourism that contributes to sustainable development. The sustainable development of the region includes eradicating poverty, improving the quality of life, and developing Kumarakom as a hot tourist destination.

Initiatives promoting responsible tourism empower rural women to be self-sufficient and foster the emergence of several social entrepreneurs who address social issues through community engagement [10]. The rural women and women entrepreneurs played a significant role in transforming Kumarakom into a responsible tourist destination by ensuring that its economic, social, and environmental obligations were met.

The successful implementation of responsible tourism served as a stepping stone for a leading community-based women's empowerment initiative with a focus on women [8]. This model of tourism must be incorporated into other developing tourist destinations to achieve stable social progress in which tourism directly benefits the local community. This could encourage rural women's self-determination, leadership, socio-economic development, and entrepreneurialism.

There were many concerns in connection with tourism development, but most of them were addressed by the Grama Panchayat. Responsible Tourism initiatives aid in the development of projects and the acquisition of funds necessary for their execution. A sewage treatment plant has been constructed in Kumarakom to prevent the pollution of Vembanad lake by houseboats. According to the President of the Kumarakom Grama Panchayat, the plastic ban must be strictly enforced within the Panchayat.

The Responsible Tourism movement is responsible for the declaration of the bird sanctuary area as a plastic-free zone. The Responsible Tourism movement has attempted to convert previously uncultivated land back into agricultural land [4]. To provide tourists and locals with access to the lakes, a walkway project has been constructed. Because of Responsible Tourism, residents are vigilant against immoral activities and atrocities against women. At a time when case studies are gaining popularity, this stakeholder-based study encourages a more participatory approach and stakeholder consultation [7].

2 Women Entrepreneurs and Rural Tourism.

Kullu is a popular tourist destination due to its pristine nature, mild climate, clean air, unpolluted riverbanks, and beautiful farmlands [5]. Numerous tourists flock to this location to enjoy the recreational opportunities and scenic countryside. Women's self-help groups in this village recognized the importance of this location as a tourist destination and began producing handicrafts and rural art.

These rural women acquire their craft skills from the weaving society as well as from a family tradition that has been passed down, cultivated, and refined over many years [6]. This shawl-making by rural women is a recent addition to Himachal Pradesh's tradition. Here, farming is the primary occupation for women. And this serves as a secondary source of income for numerous rural housewives.

In Kerala, rural women formed self-help groups and opened rural accommodation for foreign visitors. They also serve tourists, both international and local cuisine. This provides rural women with a good living. Kerala's rural women are better educated and therefore capable of engaging in diverse tourism-related entrepreneurial endeavours [5]. Kerala's rural women are adept at social networking. Through self-help groups, these women can successfully navigate difficult business situations and share financial support and experience. However, rural women continue to be unable to work independently as entrepreneurs and continue to prefer working in self-help groups.

Telangana State Tourism Development Corporation Limited provides a vast selection of tourism packages, including river cruises, sound and light shows, customised tours, adventure journeys to major destinations, forts, pilgrimages, and large-scale wildlife exploration [1]. TSTDCL should partner with local rural people (SHG's) in tourist destinations and provide the necessary training, financial support, and marketing support to run enterprises at medium and small businesses such as hotels and lodges, restaurants, taxi and car rentals, photography, gift shops, luggage delivery services, translator services, laundry facilities, tourism consulting firms, arts and culture museums, ticket and reservation services, travel agencies, and student educational services.

It is confirmed that the direct female actors on the Rajadinha Circuit are between the ages of 44 and 70. These married or widowed women only have a primary education [3]. In addition to developing rural tourism-related activities, these women do housework and care for their families. This study raised the question of whether or not women in the family are employed in rural tourism [9]. According to the report of one of the interviewees, "there aren't any because their families lack education and lack support because they were not permitted to work." Even such people were unable to access the labour market.



Fig:01 – community-based tourism

3 Coconut Lagoon

This resort, Coconut Lagoon, is situated in a sheltered and enchanting cove in Kumarakom, reflecting the diversity and splendour of Vemband Lake. A CGH Earth experience that is respectful of Kuttanad's rich but fragile ecosphere and vibrant culture. Where reconstructed agrarian homes offer access to a delightful world following the gentle pulse of the backwaters.

CGH Earth has always collaborated with the local community, embraced the local ethos, and engaged in eco-friendly practices. There are no walls, physical or otherwise, between Coconut Lagoon and the surrounding village. During their stay at the resort, tourists will be cared for by members of the local community who are brimming with local knowledge and anecdotes. Coconut Lagoon is committed not only to preserving the culture but also the delicate ecosystem.

To reduce waste, all wet waste is converted into biogas for cooking and vermin-compost for fertiliser. The few paper and plastic items that are discarded as dry waste are repurposed as construction materials or decorative pieces. The commitment of CGH Earth to preserving the ecosystem extends to the local fauna as well.

Coconut Lagoon is home to a rare breed of cows from neighbouring Vechoor Village. This indigenous cattle breed is endangered, but you can find them grazing peacefully on the resort's lawns. Coconut Lagoon is more than just an extension of the village; it is a regional celebration.

According to Mr. Ebly, the restaurant's caption, "The majority of our employees were born and raised in the neighbourhood. Not only do they have an intimate understanding of the land and culture, but they are also deeply concerned with preserving both. They are subject to a simple, practical discipline that we have developed. They are taught by their elders in a manner reminiscent of India's ancient gurukul system. It somehow permits naturally hospitable people to be themselves".



Fig:02 – tourism inclusive approach

4 Social Responsibility and Coconut Lagoon Initiative

Coconut Lagoon has numerous responsible tourism initiatives, including tree planting, renewable energy and bio gas, rainwater harvesting and wastewater recycling, organic farming, vermiculture, planting local species to attract and conserve birds and butterflies, planting mangroves, local purchasing of fruit, vegetables, crafts, urns for the properties and recruitment of local employees.

4.1 Floating Tea Shop

Life in backwaters depends on the ability to float from one location to another. The floating tea shop exemplifies one aspect of this lifestyle. This is also an opportunity to meet the Tea Lady from the village close to the resort.

5 Biography of Mrs. Shanthakumari

Mrs. Shanthakumari, 72 years old, resident of Kavanattinkara village, was running a local teashop for the local residents and for the labourers who were working for the resort along with her husband, Mr. Keshavan. She has got two sons, Mr. Anilkumar, who has a houseboat, and Mr. Pramod, who is a tourist taxi driver. Mrs. Shanthakumari lost her husband, Mr. Keshavan in the year 2020 and she was forced to close the tea shop due to the lack of support. As an active woman, Shanthamma didn't want to be idle and she was in search of various possibilities to get engaged in various activities. She was part of Kudumbasree, a local self-help group in the village.

The management of Coconut Lagoon resort somehow came to know of the altered way of life of Mrs. Shanthakumari and they put forward a suggestion regarding a Floating Tea Shop for the guests who are staying in their resort. Mrs. Shanthakumari family was instrumental during the construction of Coconut Lagoon resort. Mrs. Shanthamma was happy to take up the new role of running the Floating Tea Shop. Since she was born and brought up in the backwater region, it wasn't a hurdle for her to row the boat and sell tea. Later, the resort management asked her to add some snacks to the menu as well to serve along with tea.

6 Present engagement and achievements

The concept of responsible tourism overlaps extensively with related ideas such as sustainable tourism, ethical tourism, pro-poor tourism, and integrated tourism [2]. And here it's true, the little initiative of the Coconut Lagoon resort played a significant role in changing the entire lifestyle of Mrs. Shanthamma. She started communicating with both domestic and international tourists who were staying at the resort. It was an opportunity for her to earn something through the new responsibility to support her family.

It is highly appreciated that Mrs. Shanthamma is earning and supporting her family at this age with the skill set that she acquired through the new job. As an author, I had an opportunity to meet Mrs. Shanthamma in person when I visited the resort as part of this research. It was a memorable occasion to witness the dynamic personality and customer relations skills of Mrs. Shantkumari, a responsible tourism service provider. She would make sure that every tourist who interacts with her has some memorable experience.

7 Involvement in tourism

Mrs. Shantkumari's new initiative is an appropriate example for rural tourism promotion and cultural exchange. The authentic way of extending service with a smiling face to the tourist is given a new name by Mrs. Shantkumari — "Chaya Chechi." Within a short span of time, "Chaya Chechi" became popular and the resort's name as well. "Chaya Chechi" became the brand ambassador of Coconut Lagoon resort and people started booking the resort to have tea from "Chaya Chechi" — Mrs. Shantkumari.



Fig:03 - Mrs. Shantkumari's on floating tea shop

8 Hospitality Skillset Acquired

From the interview with various stakeholders, a set of unique facts about Shanthakumari were given in connection with her skills that she acquired at the age of 72. A few of them are as follows.

8.1 Teamwork

Almost every profession in the hotel business requires collaboration. A restaurant manager, for example, must collaborate with the front-desk employees to keep customers pleased. In the kitchen, members of the team must collaborate to ensure that food is produced on time and at the highest possible standard. Customers will not receive the high-quality service they expect if there is no effective teamwork. Shanthakumari is one such example for team work. She is maintaining a very good rapport with all the staff of the resort. From the interview, it is observed that no one is having difference of opinion about their 'Chechi'.

8.2 Flexibility

Not only do most hospitality employees work long and tough schedules, but they are often expected to work over the holidays. To ensure that they can work when needed throughout the hectic season, employees must be flexible with their personal arrangements. Working these gruelling shifts has its advantages, of course. Most employers will provide incentives such as bonuses or more vacation days to be taken later in the year. Shanthakumari is role model for the employees who are working in the resort for the committed work irrespective of the day or special days. Shanthakumari has a policy that everything in hospitality is judged by the consumers, all the services must be of the best quality in order to assure the customer satisfaction. It is mandatory to have the attention to detail when it comes to the work.

8.3 Time Management

Jobs need to be completed in a timely manner in order for all aspects of a resort or hotel to run smoothly. For example, new customers should be given more attention and timely service. Otherwise, the organisation would receive a bad review. Mr. Suresh, the one who is in charge of the Ayurveda and Kalari centres, mentioned the active involvement and time-bound service of Mrs. Shanthakumari.

8.4 Communication

Communication skills are essential for achieving client satisfaction. Individuals who desire to improve their communication abilities might consider working in the hospitality business. This is owing to the large number of people that hospitality workers deal with on a daily basis, each with their unique set of questions and/or issues. Mr. and Mrs. Antonio, from Spain, a repeat customer of the resort, were talking about the multi-linguistic capacity of Mrs. Shanthakumari. They were very happy to communicate with Mrs. Shanthakumari not only in English but also a few words in Spanish. The adaptability of Mrs. Shanthakumari is really appreciated by everyone.

8.5 Attracting Repeated Customers

Interpersonal skills are crucial in customer service; thus, they will be applied on a daily basis when working in the hotel business. Interpersonal skills are acquired through interactions with co-workers. Empathy, negotiating, listening, creative thinking, patience, and tolerance are examples of social skills. Mrs. Shanthakumari's IPR skills have aided the resort in gaining repeat and referred customers. It's unbelievable that there are guests who are booking and staying in the resort to meet and have tea from their 'Chaya Chechi'.

8.6 Economic Benefits

Through the establishment of enterprises such as lodging facilities, restaurants, craft production, and cultural entertainment, tourism can broaden and diversify alternate sources of revenue. The revenues collected aid in the strengthening of local economies and the expansion of household expenditure power. This case never tried to get details of monetary benefits received by Shanthakumari, but she mentioned that she was getting a decent income from the floating teashop. She also added that there are clients who are very particular about giving tips in appreciation of her untiring service with a smile. This money would be a great help to her family as well. Shanthakumari is self-reliant at this age and gets full support from her family throughout.

9 Conclusion

The case of Shanthakumari is a living illustration for commitment to the local economy, social development, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. This can be an indicator to policymakers, tourism planners, researchers, and tourism-related experts for enhancing sustainability efforts and local entrepreneurship. There are many such cases of employment creation and self-reliance among local folk due to the development of the houseboat industry in Kerala coast. As the author of this case study comes to a close, it is a privilege to thank Mrs. Shanthakumari for her hard work and enthusiasm as a representative of rural and responsible tourism.

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